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ABSTRACT

In May 1982 a questionnaire eliciting information about federal document needs and the experiences of librarians in libraries that are not depositories was mailed to more than 150 libraries in the Western New York region. Replies were received from 57 libraries: approximately 20% from college libraries; 50% from public libraries; and 30% from special libraries, including medical, law, business and industry, and museum libraries. Responses to the questions tended to vary by type of library, thus the tabulations are broken down by college, public, and special libraries. This document provides brief discussions of the findings on: collections; sources of information; type of information sought; problems with interlibrary loan; bibliographic access to documents; document data bases; workshops and training programs; and a union list of federal documents. Comments and suggestions made by the respondents are grouped by type of library and reproduced in the final section. A copy of the questionnaire and a tally of the responses from each type of nondepository library are included. The survey was undertaken as part of a project of the Task Force on Federal Depository Library Service in New York State. (THC)

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SURVEY OF NON-DEPOSITORY LIBRARIES CONCERNING FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY SERVICE IN WESTERN NEW YORK

Compiled by Karen F. Smith

June, 1982

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A questionnaire was mailed to more than 150 libraries in the Western New York region as a means of eliciting information about federal document needs and the experiences of librarians in meeting those needs in libraries which are not depositories. Replies were received from 57 libraries: approximately 20% from college libraries; 50% from public libraries; and 30% from special libraries including medical libraries, law libraries, business and industry, and museum libraries. Responses to the questions tended to vary by type of library, thus the tabulations are broken down by college (C), public (P), and special (S) libraries.

COLLECTIONS

The most widely held federal document title in non-depository libraries is the United States Government Manual, but it is available in only half of the surveyed libraries. Question 1 (see questionnaire attached) reveals a shocking lack of availability of basic federal information resources in the libraries closest to the people. A person who needs the Federal Register will be most apt to find it at a college library or a special library. The Code of Federal Regulations is available almost exclusively in special libraries. The most popular title in public libraries is the Statistical Abstract but like the Government Manual it is only available in half the public libraries. The Statutes at Large and the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents are available almost nowhere outside of the depository libraries.

It is possible that comparable information is being provided through commercial sources such as the U. S. Code, Congressional and Administrative News published by West as a substitute for the Statutes at Large published by GPO. However, when asked if their patrons ever needed federal information which the local library could not supply, the overwhelming response of the librarians was YES. Only a few small public libraries said that their patrons never ask for federal information.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

When the local library cannot meet the patron's needs, the librarian, regardless of type of library, is most apt to turn to the nearest depository library. Few librarians contact the regional depository directly, preferring to send requests through the regular Interlibrary Loan channels. Special librarians are more apt than others to seek help from a government agency directly. Hardly anyone uses the Federal Information Center.

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TYPE OF INFORMATION SOUGHT

Requests for federal information most often involve copies of laws or regulations closely followed in popularity by census data or other statistics. College and special librarians are most apt to be looking for individual reports or special studies. One library which subscribes to the Readex Depository microprint collection finds itself trying to locate non-depository items.

PROBLEMS WITH INTERLIBRARY LOAN

A majority of the librarians denied having problems with interlibrary loan. However, over a quarter of the librarians did not respond to this question because they have never had occasion to request anything through ILL. The 12 librarians who have had problems cited the difficulty of verifying citations properly, figuring out who might have the document and being told that the document does not circulate. Turn around time can also be a problem.

Many of the public libraries cannot utilize documents in micro formats because they do not have microfiche readers. No librarian specifically mentioned Readex microprint as being a problem.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC ACCESS TO DOCUMENTS

The Monthly Catalog of U. S. Government Publications is the most widely available index for federal documents yet it is held by only 21 of the 57 libraries. Index Medicus is held by 14 libraries. On the average, college libraries subscribe to two document indexes, special libraries subscribe to one, and public libraries have one document index for every three libraries.

DOCUMENT DATA BASES

NTIS, the granddaddy of the on-line document data bases, is still the one most widely used. NTIS is searched in 9 libraries; the Monthly Catalog in 8 libraries; and ERIC in 7 libraries. Only one public library does data base searching whereas on-line data bases are commonplace in special libraries.

WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Most librarians felt there was a need for more continuing education opportunities dealing with documents. Suggested topics ranged from very general basic information on the federal depository system to highly specialized material on patents. The Census and the Federal Register were checked most often followed by congressional materials and legal materials.

UNION LIST OF FEDERAL DOCUMENTS

The vote was 33 to 19 in favor of a Union List of Federal Documents. The Western New York Library Resources Council Union List of Serials includes very few government serial titles and even the titles that are listed do not seem to have complete holdings appended. Some of the librarians who favor a Union List might not be as enthusiastic if it comes out on microfiche and is arranged by Item No. not by title.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Most of the Librarians took the time to add thoughtful comments at the end of the questionnaire. The problems they have with documents suggest many areas which should be addressed by a STATE PLAN for federal depository library service. The comments are reproduced below, grouped by type of library and edited slightly when necessary to improve readability.

Colleges

We send our patrons to area libraries: particularly SUNY/Buffalo and Buffalo and Erie County Public Library (Central). We have never requested documents through ILL. We have never used microfilm of documents. As we have little call for documents and seldom have the need to help with interpretation, training is not necessary.

We are a small two-year co-educational liberal arts college and have been able to satisfy our requests thru Interlibrary Loans. We recently discontinued the Monthly Catalog due to limited use and need.

We have not been able to obtain the status of a Federal Depository, because slots in our Congressional District are all filled. We subscribe to a number of basic sets and otherwise rely on the Readex Microprint Depository set (1956-1978, will purchase later years as money becomes available). We also have the Serial Set in microform. In recent years (1950-date), we have purchased Census of Population, U. S. and N. Y. summary volumes (only) in paper. For other volumes, we rely on fiche (or ILL). Have recent economic censuses in fiche.

Government documents are difficult to deal with because, despite the fact that you know what agency did a report and on what topic, there is no guarantee that you will be able to locate the exact study you are looking for. I would call the library at UB that I thought should have a copy of that item due to the subject covered and find that it didn't. Possibly some instruction for area librarians on the depository libraries in the area, where they keep materials, how they are listed, and who's in charge, would be helpful for librarians who don't work at the depository libraries. We have computer searches done through the council. We don't have a computer here.

We have been able to operate quite well on the minimal number of government documents we own.

Our experience with the Federal Information Center has been very disappointing. We need training on how to locate congressional material which has gone to subcommittees for discussion, etc. We use government documents only upon special requests of students, faculty or staff. A refresher course would be quite useful, as would a union list of the documents in area libraries.

Aside from an occasional request and perhaps because of the nature of our curriculum we do not have a great call for this type of material. We do appreciate the services of the depository libraries when we do need this type of information.

What bothers me is the mass of government material that is "out there." Also, knowing what is available and what isn't and resistance to use generated possibly by document format and by general lack of information about government documents.

Access to government documents poses several problems for small or medium size libraries. Our collection is limited and may be even further limited since demise of Selected U. S. Government Publications from which we did most of our selecting for individual studies and reports. When government document material is needed which we cannot supply our usual response is to refer the patron to one of the depository libraries. My suspicion is that most patrons do not follow through to secure the material. Why? The process is too formidable for many users: a trip to another library, limited hours of service, lack of professional help during some service hours, complexity of document indexes for lay user. Publicity is sorely needed - to both lay users and the local libraries to promote awareness and use of government documents. It might be useful to have a one-page handout of essential info about Western New York depository libraries to give to such patrons that might encourage their follow through. Information like: specific locations of government document collections, hours, contact persons, phone numbers, brief description of collection and services. An expanded version of the above - a short pamphlet - for librarians in the Western New York area would also be useful, as would a visit/orientation to the depository libraries for local librarians. A series of commonly asked questions about government documents might be useful. Another concern: This type of printed data is often a one-shot effort and not revised as the information changes.

There are times when I do not have specific enough information to order items through interloan. What services do depository libraries offer? telephone reference service? help with verifying an item for interloan? I would like specific training sessions on areas such as census data. Maybe a newsletter on new, interesting items received.

We sometimes have problems getting census material through interlibrary loan although we don't send for that many.

Public Libraries

I think a union list would be used too rarely to justify the cost. More publicity is probably a good idea. However, even if my patrons were aware of all that is available, I doubt that they would have much use for the materials.

We would use Interlibrary Loan service through Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Library System if we received any requests for federal information.

We are a very small village library and have had no requests for these documents. I would refer them to Jamestown if we did and it is near enough that probably they go there first anyway.

There is relatively low awareness on the part of the public concerning the scope and type of information available in government documents. Also, there is difficulty in gaining access to specific material.

Since our library is small, we get no requests for government documents. I assume anyone needing them is consulting larger public libraries or college libraries. However, through our interloan system I am sure we could borrow or locate any requested.

Our library is very small. Either our patrons have no interest in government documents or they go directly to the main library.

I wish we had current statistics on standard of living for major U. S. cities. People are always moving from one place to another and we lack information on large cities.

Lack of knowledge of what is available is a big problem.

When patrons need information which is not available in our library, we do not get the information for them. We refer people to the nearest depository, since delivery of government documents in the Nioga system is non-existent. The depository may have a fine collection of documents but little trickles down to member libraries. I would never attempt an interlibrary loan request. We have no Monthly Catalog with which to verify titles and Nioga is very strict about interloaning unverified items. We have the 1970 Census on fiche. The print is very small and it was hard to use because of constant switching around between pages. It was necessary to change fiche frequently, focus and re-focus. We are getting the 1980 in hard copy. Of course we could use training, but with no means of selecting documents, we don't have enough worth bothering about. My staff could use help with legal materials and maybe congressional. It's great to set up these committees, but with the demise of the Selected List and no system-wide attack on problems of ordering, the applicability to the smaller library is miniscule. Nioga has been particularly remiss in helping non-depository libraries be aware of government document availability and desirability.

There are, undoubtedly, many items in the federal depository which might help our patrons. Problem is, we don't have a feel for what's available.

Our library is small and we don't have much extra space to display documents. We send interloan requests to the Buffalo Library but either they don't circulate or are out at the time of the request.

The Federal Register always seems to come late. The F. C. C. Reports at Lockwood are always 3-4 months behind. Information that may be found in federal government documents is very hard to get in a timely manner. Our patrons often used the federal population censuses 1790-1890. Now that the National Archives and Records Service has discontinued the sending of microfilm, many patrons are unhappy.

Our patrons probably need federal information which is not available here, but right off hand I can't think of any particular instances.

We do not have any microform readers. We can borrow a fiche reader from System, but not for film.

We are a very small village library within five miles of Jamestown and we do not subscribe to any government documents. All requests for this material are handled either thru interloan or directly with Prendergast. The only materials we keep are IRS forms and tax books.

Our Statistical Abstract is 1977. It hasn't been used for 4 years.

Special Libraries

Hospital libraries do not receive requests for government documents frequently. But when we do, it is needed urgently. A Union List would be a waste if it is consulted only a few times a year. Training is helpful to some extent, but if the knowledge and skills are not used regularly they cannot be retained for a long period of time. It seems to me the most helpful service would be the availability of qualified contact persons at the depository libraries or other large libraries who can be called for help when the need arises. We need a list of the various government document collections and the name and phone number of contact persons. In another word, we need access points to collections.

We don't use the depositories all that much. If the attorneys want it, we almost always buy it. We have used the patents at BECPL via ILL at WNYLRC. That's an area we've never tried to figure out ourselves. If there is much call for patents in this area, perhaps a short course would help.

Access to government documents is a problem because of the high cost of available indexes. It is often difficult to determine the issuing body for catalog entry if several agencies are given or if a hierarchy of departments and divisions appears on the publication. CIP for government documents would be a great help. ILL is often a problem because normal access by author or title may not be sufficient for retrieval. Usual ILL sources are often not informed about document holdings in their own institutions. It would be great if depository libraries could circulate information on

availability (including how to request them on ILL) of major documents of interest to specific subject fields. I realize that preparing such lists would probably take so much staff time that this is prohibitive, but maybe sections could be copied out of subject listings of incoming documents.

Developing a Union List should be a high priority. Some documents appear in the Union List of Serials depending on whether or not the library holding them considers them a serial. What is needed is a listing of series holdings, collection policy, and location. (The split locations of many documents at SUNYAB is a particular problem.) Use of the depository collections is only possible if users know where and what collections exist. Training sessions would be best coordinated through the W.N.Y. Library Resources Council. The Buffalo Area Online Users Group would be happy to help plan a presentation on searching/ordering government documents online.

The problem with ILL is that government documents must often be used in the library and sections are too long to be xeroxed. The problem with government documents is becoming familiar enough with the contents of the various sources in order to refer your patron to the correct one . . . and then locating a close library to send him/her to.

State University of New York at Buffalo

CHARLES B. SEARS LAW LIBRARY

May 18, 1982

Dear Colleague,

The State Librarian has recently appointed a Task Force on Federal Depository Library Service in New York State with a representative from each of the 3-Rs regions. David Karre from the Niagara Falls Public Library and I represent the Western New York Region. Our job is to find out how well the Depository Libraries are fulfilling their function and how federal documents service to the citizens of the region might be improved.

The goal of the Task Force is to draft a STATE PLAN for federal depository library service. It is important that this plan be based on advice from users and from the library and information community at large as well as from depository librarians. We are seeking the widest possible participation in the formulation of this plan.

You can help us by sharing your experiences and identifying problems which need to be addressed by this plan to improve depository services. The enclosed questionnaire covers some of the problem areas and your feedback will be extremely valuable to the Task Force.

A regional meeting of depository librarians is scheduled for Friday, June 18, 1982 to assess the depository situation in Western New York. We depository librarians may all think we are doing a great job unless you tell us otherwise. We need to have your comments and suggestions before that meeting, by Monday, June 14th at the latest. The meeting will be held in the Documents Department of Lockwood Library here at SUNY Buffalo from 10:00-3:00. You are welcome to attend if you like.

I want to encourage you to discuss the questionnaire with or solicit ideas from other librarians and/or patrons in your library. Please tell us how we can best get "Documents to the People" in Western New York.

Sincerely yours,

Karen F. Smith

Karen F. Smith
Documents Librarian &
Task Force Representative

DEPOSITORY LIBRARIES:
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library
Niagara Falls Public Library
St. Bonaventure University
Cheektowaga Public Library
SUNY Buffalo: Lockwood Library
SUNY Buffalo: Law Library

JOHN LORD O'BRIAN HALL AMHERST CAMPUS BUFFALO, NEW YORK 14260 TEL. (716)636-2043

Responses from Nondepository Libraries

FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY SERVICE IN WESTERN NEW YORK

Library 12 - College 28 - Public 17 - Special

Person responding _____

1. Does your library get any of the following basic federal documents?

C	P	S	
3	2	1	Budget of the United States Government
3	2	2	Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance
4	10	1	Census of Population
2	0	9	Code of Federal Regulations
6	10	3	Congressional Directory - 4th
7	5	5	Congressional Record - 5th
9	2	11	Federal Register - 3rd
5	7	2	Historical Statistics of the United States
9	14	4	Statistical Abstract - 2nd
0	0	1	Statutes at Large
5	0	1	Supreme Court Reports
5	3	2	United States Code
8	13	7	United States Government Manual - 1st
1	0	0	Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents

2. Do your patrons ever need federal information which is not available in your library?

C	P	S		C	P	S	
12	18	17	Yes	0	5	0	No

If so, where do you get the information? (check all that apply)

C	P	S	
10	15	16	nearest depository library
1	3	3	New York State Library
3	3	2	Federal Information Center
1	8	9	government agency
4	8	5	local Congressman
1	2	2	Other (explain) GPO, System, another library, NTIS

3. What is the nature of the requests you refer? (check all that apply)

C	P	S	
5	6	6	Congressional hearings or status of bills
5	15	10	copies of laws or regulations
5	16	8	census data or other statistics
8	4	11	copies of reports or studies
1	1	2	Other (describe) pre 1956 or very recent Depository items, non-depository items, geneology records, patents, addresses of federal agencies, names of committee members, published papers

4. Do you have any problems getting federal documents through Interlibrary Loan?

C	P	S		C	P	S	
6	14	10	No	3	4	5	Yes (explain) citation verification difficult, holdings not known, documents do not circulate, takes too long

5. Do you have any problems using documents in microform?

C	P	S		C	P	S	
10	9	11	No	0	13	5	Yes (explain) Do not own a microfiche reader, no microfilm reader, no reader/printer

6. What document indexes does your library subscribe to?

C	P	S	
8	6	7	Monthly Catalog of U.S. Government Publications
0	0	1	Publications Reference File (from GPO on microfiche)
1	0	1	Government Reports Announcements and Index
8	1	5	Index Medicus
2	0	1	CIS Index
2	0	0	American Statistics Index
5	2	1	P.A.I.S.
0	0	3	Other (please list titles) Selected Government Publications, Chemical Abstracts, Patent Gazette, FDA Drug Bulletin, Index to Dental Literature, International Nursing Index

7. Do you search any document data bases on-line?

C	P	S	
2	0	6	Monthly Catalog
2	0	2	CIS/ASI
2	0	7	NTIS
3	1	3	ERIC
0	0	3	PRF
0	0	2	Federal Index
0	0	5	Federal Register
0	0	1	Congressional Record

8. Is there a need for more training in using government documents?

C	P	S	
4	7	4	Census materials
4	3	8	Federal Register
3	4	4	legal materials
5	2	5	Congressional materials
3	2	4	Patents
0	1	1	Other Suggestions basic information class on the federal depository and what is available through it, how to verify and locate government documents

9. Would a Union List of Federal Documents be useful to you?

c	p	s		c	p	s	
7	14	12	Yes	5	9	5	No

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS:
collections? access? publicity? training? bibliographic control? What bothers you about government documents? Please be as specific and detailed as possible.

Will a representative from your library be coming to the meeting on June 18th?

Name:_____

Telephone:_____

PLEASE RETURN QUESTIONNAIRE TO: Karen F. Smith, Law Library, O'Brian Hall, SUNY at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY 14260 before Monday, June 14th

THANK YOU!